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ABSTRACT

The parent-teacher conference is widely endorsed as an effective method of reporting pupil progress. They are particularly valuable because the conferences provide an opportunity for two-way communication about students. The understanding gained in a conference can help the school and home work together to bring out the maximum in a student. Recently, people have realized that the parent-conference is also a great tool for improving school-community relations. This paper provides administrators and teachers with specific recommendations for improving parent-teacher conferences. Included are suggestions for planning, conducting, and evaluating conferences, as well as for conducting a simulation to give teachers practice in dealing with various kinds of parent behavior. The simulation is designed to foster awareness both of the impact of predominant teacher interaction styles on parents and of the parent styles that can be difficult to deal with. (Author/IRT)

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Simformation 6

Planning, conducting, and evaluating parent-teacher conferences

THE WISCONSIN RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT CENTER

BA 013 925

HSCR

HOME·SCHOOL·COMMUNITY RELATIONS

FOREWORD

Since 1973, the Home-School-Community Relations Project at the Wisconsin Research and Development Center for Cognitive Learning has been involved in research related to the establishment of a supportive, meaningful relationship among the home, school, and community. Support and cooperation, which lead to optimal child growth and development, can exist when two conditions are met:

1. the staff of a school is aware of and responsive to the educational expectations and available resources of the community; and

2. the community is aware of and responsive to the instructional expectations and the program being implemented at the school.

Schools become involved in many activities directed at creating good relationships among the home, school, and community. Unfortunately, these activities are often unrelated and unfocused. By establishing a home-school-community relations program, rather than simply participating in a set of relatively isolated activities, a school can begin to develop a mutually supportive relationship among the home, school, and community.

There are four steps to creating a good home-school-community relations program. First, an analysis of the present state of school-community relations must be conducted. This analysis involves determining the issues or problems which exist and identifying those groups in the community which are associated with the issues. Second, the school staff must plan a program which is based upon the issues and groups that have been identified. This step includes planning a coordinated set of activities appropriate to the school community, identifying the personnel who will be responsible for carrying out various aspects of these activities, and setting timelines and procedures for the implementation of the program. The third step consists of implementing the program, and the final step is its evaluation. The program is evaluated by determining whether the appropriate activities, responsible personnel, and correct timelines and procedures were identified. This evaluation occurs both during and following implementation of the plan.

(continued on back cover)

SIMFORMATION 6: PLANNING, CONDUCTING, AND EVALUATING PARENT-TEACHER CONFERENCES

by

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Report from the Project on
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WISCONSIN RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT CENTER FOR COGNITIVE LEARNING

MISSION

The mission of the Wisconsin Research and Development Center for Cognitive Learning is to help learners develop as rapidly and effectively as possible their potential as human beings and as contributing members of society. The R&D Center is striving to fulfill this goal by

- conducting research to discover more about how children learn
- developing improved instructional strategies, processes and materials for school administrators, teachers, and children, and
- offering assistance to educators and citizens which will help transfer the outcomes of research and development into practice

PROGRAM

The activities of the Wisconsin R&D Center are organized around one unifying theme, Individually Guided Education.

FUNDING

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I

THE VALUE OF PARENT-TEACHER CONFERENCES

The parent-teacher conference is widely endorsed as an effective method of reporting pupil progress. Many educators believe that this is the best method of detailing the progress of the individual student. It is an answer to the critics of the report card who seek a reporting system with warmth and personalization. Parent-teacher conferences are particularly valuable because they facilitate a two-way flow of information regarding pupil progress. Parents have the opportunity to provide information about the child's growth from the standpoint of his behavior at home. The understandings gained in the conference can harmonize and consolidate the motivational influences of the home and the school and help the child reach his fullest potential.

In recent years school people, pressed by the need for greater public support of the schools, have noted the school-community relations value of parent-teacher conferences. In many cases the parent-teacher conference is the first and only direct contact between the home and the school. The parent-teacher conference provides an opportunity for the teacher to become a school-community

relations agent for the instructional unit, the school, and the entire school system. Indeed, the attitude of many parents toward the school district is merely the accumulation of individual experiences at the school and unit level. The face-to-face conference, if used wisely, is unparalleled in its ability not only to prevent misunderstandings but also to build a communication bridge between the home and the school. Failure to develop satisfactory parent-teacher conferences, therefore, may have serious consequences.

Parent-teacher conferences can also provide the school and the district with information which will help direct future home-school-community relations efforts. Through conferences, teachers become aware of the issues of concern to parents. This information can then be compiled into a list of parents' major concerns, and specific parents who will be most helpful in resolving these issues can be identified.

The effectiveness of the parent-teacher conference depends on the preparation and skill of the teacher. If the conference is to increase instructional efficiency and facilitate communication between the home and the school, it must be a viable communication procedure. Unfortunately, talking with parents is a skill which few teachers have been taught. Too often new teachers must turn to veteran teachers or rely upon trial and error for a model for parent-teacher conference behavior. It is little wonder, then, that many teachers and parents fail to regard the conference as an opportunity; rather they view it as an unpleasant required activity.

The purpose of this Simformation is to provide administrators and teachers with specific recommendations for improving parent-teacher conferences. Included are suggestions for planning, conducting, and evaluating conferences, and a simulation to give teachers practice in dealing with various kinds of parent behaviors. The information presented should provide a framework for training sessions directed at getting the most out of parent-teacher conferences.

II

PRE-CONFERENCE PLANNING

In order to conduct a worthwhile, effective conference, it is essential that the teacher and unit do some pre-conference planning. There are four essential parts to pre-conference planning:

1. Collecting the student's work samples, test data, and written progress reports
2. Scheduling the conferences
3. Determining the parents' objectives for the conference
4. Determining the teachers' objectives for the conference

The student's work samples should be representative of his work throughout the time period. Choose papers of varying quality and subject matter, not always the best papers.

When scheduling conferences, it is important that the limited amount of time be used fully. Consider the following options:

a. Dismiss classes on two afternoons. Schedule conferences for the afternoon and evening.
b. Use an entire day for the conferences.
c. Consider 7:00 to 8:00 as part of conference scheduling time.
d. Space conferences over a two- or three-week period.

Perhaps the most essential step in preparing for conferences is one which is frequently overlooked: communicating with parents prior to the conference to exchange conference objectives. Teachers commonly have particular topics to discuss during the conference. It is beneficial to not only communicate these to the home, but also to determine those topics about which the parents would like to

confer. If this information is exchanged prior to the conference, both parties will have had an opportunity to prepare for the discussion. The teacher will have had time to collect data and/or work samples for the area of concern to the parents. The parents will have had a chance to talk with their child about the areas of concern to the teachers. The result is more efficient and effective communication during the conference.

A recent Gallup Poll on public attitudes toward education indicated that parents were little concerned with such difficult social issues as minority group studies, overcrowding, sexism, and racial prejudice. Instead, parents are interested primarily in information "which enables them to make better judgments about the schools and the education of their children."[1] That is, parents want more information about "my child." It is not surprising, then, that parents are often interested in such topics as how things are done at school, how subjects are taught, and how time is spent.[2]

To assist teachers to establish conference objectives, two different forms for communicating with parents have been included (Figures 1 and 2) as examples.

---

[1]George H. Gallup, "Sixth Annual Gallup Poll of Public Attitudes Toward Education." Phi Delta Kappan, LVI, No. 1, (September, 1974), pp. 20-32.

[2]Grace Langdon, "What People Want of Their Schools." Partners in Education, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1958), p. 180.

Turtle Lake School
1141 W. Co. Rd. I
St. Paul, Minnesota 55112

November 9, 1976

Dear Parents:

During the third week in November we will be holding a conference about your child's progress. This fall children will be released for four half days, grades 1-6. Kindergarten students will not have class on November 16, 17, 18, and 19. The conference days will begin on Tuesday, November 16 and conclude on Friday, November 19. As mentioned in a previous letter, this year we are including two evening conferences, November 16 and 17, for those who cannot attend during the day. Scheduling for evening conferences was done through the letter of November 1. The children will be excused at 12:00 each of the conference days. Lunch will not be served at school on those days.

Conferences will be scheduled for twenty minutes with your child's home room teacher, beginning at 12:30 p.m. If you wish to visit with other teachers your child works with, please indicate this on the attached questionnaire.

Each home room teacher will fully discuss all aspects of your child's experience at Turtle Lake. At the same time we feel it is desirable for you to meet other teachers who are working with your child and we wish to provide the opportunity for you.

Attached you will find the date and time of your child's conference and a questionnaire. This questionnaire is a means of asking you about specific areas you would like to discuss at your child's conference. It is hoped in this way the conference will become more meaningful for you by focusing on your questions. Please return the slip and questionnaire as soon as possible indicating whether or not this day and time are suitable. We will attempt to schedule the conferences for all children of a family on the same day. If you cannot come on the day assigned it may be necessary for us to reschedule your conferences on several days. If you have any questions, please call 484-2150.

Sincerely,

Turtle Lake Staff

Figure 1. Pre-conference survey form #1.

Harrison "Pod" School
Janesville, Wisconsin

Date _____

REQUEST FOR A PARENT-TEACHER CONFERENCE

Dear _____

We would like to invite you to a parent-teacher conference to discuss the progress in school of _____. The conference is scheduled for the following date and time. DATE: _____ TIME: _____. In order that teachers may better prepare for your conference, would you please check two or three of the following areas which you especially want to discuss:

_____ Reading
_____ Arithmetic
_____ Spelling
_____ Social Studies
___ Written Expression
___ Oral Expression
___ Work and Study Habits
___ Special Areas - art, phy. ed., and music
___ School Citizenship
___ Your child's ability range
___ Your child's achievement when compared with that of other children his age
___ Your child's adjustment to his school

Please return this request for a conference as soon as possible to your child's homeroom teacher. If you are unable to come to a conference at the time given above, please suggest a more convenient time. Because of the number of conferences which need to be held, your promptness in being at school at the scheduled time would be appreciated. Our teachers will do their best to begin the conference at the time schoduled.

_____ _____
Parent Signature

- -

(Please detach and keep this lower portion as a reminder)

We would like to have your child present for the conference: ___Yes ___No
Your child's teachers have the following areas they wish to discuss with you:

_____

_____

_____

_____

Conference Date: _____ Conference Time: _____

Unit: _____ Unit Leader: _____
Signature

Figure 2. Pre-conference survey form #2.

Anticipating Parents' Concerns

It is possible to anticipate many of the areas which will be of concern to parents. You may wish to prepare a survey form for your school to send home to parents before the conference. Typical areas of concern include:[3]

How the child is progressing in school work

.....in social studies and science
.....in spelling and writing
.....in reading
.....in arithmetic
.....in music, art, etc.

How the child is taking part in the school program

.....in completing his work
.....in assuming responsibility
.....in contributing ideas
.....in using time wisely
.....in following group decisions
.....in taking part in activities

How the child is getting along with others in school

.....with children
.....with teachers

What attitudes the child has in school

.....toward himself
.....toward school work
.....toward other children
.....toward teachers

What special abilities and interests the child has

.....in working with others
.....in school work
.....in physical education
.....in art, music, etc.

Recent changes the teachers have noticed in the child

.....in the way he works
.....in the way he plays
.....in working with others

What special help the child needs

.....in the school
.....at home

---

[3] MacConnell, Melby, Arndt, New Schools for a New Culture, Harper & Brothers, 1943.

These concerns are typically expressed in questions during the conference. The following list includes the questions most frequently asked by parents, along with some suggestions for teachers' responses:

--Is my child doing as well as he should in school? (Is he working up to his ability?)

--What group is he in and why? (IGE grouping patterns need to be explained.)

--What kind of books and materials is he using? (Show some and explain why.)

--May I see some of his work? (Show some, preferably from a file which will show progress and changes.)

--Does he get along well with the other children? (If not, tell in what ways. Don't use a flat "no." Try to tell some ways in which he does work with the others.)

--Is he a discipline problem? (In what ways is or isn't he?)

--Does he respect the rights and property of others?

--How is he getting along in individual subjects?

--How can I help at home? (Cite specific ways.)

--What is an I.Q.?

--What is my child's I.Q.? (Explain in terms of average, above average, etc., but emphasize the importance of the objective mastery process in an IGE school.)

--Does he eat his lunch?

--What time does school start?

If teachers have had an opportunity to send home a pre-conference survey form to find out the exact concerns of the parents, they will be prepared for most of the questions which occur during the conference. But if the survey has not been made, teachers should be prepared to answer the questions above. Most importantly, if questions are asked

during the conference which the teacher is not prepared to answer, he or she should promise to find the answer and schedule another conference or call the home. Be sure to make a note of the question in front of the parents.

Learning from Parents

While the primary purpose of the conference is to inform the parent about the progress of the learner, the conference can serve that same purpose for the teacher. The parent can provide the teacher with much useful information about the child. The insights that teachers gain about the personality and family background of their students can greatly enhance their knowledge of the learner. The conference should be viewed as a sharing between the home and the school and a chance for teachers to learn the following:[4]

How the child feels about school

.....what he likes best
.....what he dislikes
.....whether he likes to attend school

How the child spends his spare time

.....with friends
.....with hobbies
.....responsibilities at home

What particular problems the child has

.....with health
.....with hobbies
.....with strong emotions

What interest, talents, and hobbies the child has

.....in dancing, drawing, music, etc.
.....in sports, collecting, nature study, etc.
.....in science, cowboys, magic, etc.

---

[4]Ibid.

What attitudes the child has in the home

.....towards other brothers and sisters
.....towards parents and parental suggestions
.....towards responsibilities at home

What recent changes, if any, the parents have noted

.....in the way he works
.....in the way he plays
.....in his relations with other people

What special help the child needs

.....in the school
.....in the home

The parent-teacher conference can signal the start of a working relationship between parents and teachers to reinforce and supplement desirable goals for child growth, development, and achievement. The conference may also be viewed as an opportunity for the home and school to cooperate for the achievement of common objectives.

Numerous studies have shown that the child may learn better when he or she is motivationally encouraged at home.[5] The potential of the conference as a motivation-catalyst for the improvement of pupil achievement has been described by Otto and Sanders:

> The extent to which the school's and parent's goals for children agree is another factor which creates or maximizes harmony and consistency in the motivational influences among children. How well the teacher and parent intercommunicate and the degree to which the home and school supplement each other in their joint efforts to foster children's wholesome development determine other facets of the child's total motivational setting. A reporting plan which fosters the most and best in all these relationships is bound to have an important bearing on children's motivation.[6]

---

[5]Carolyn Kleinfeldt, Expectations for the Parent-Teacher Conference in the Elementary School, Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1975.

[6]Henry J. Otto and David C. Sanders, Elementary School Organization and Administration (New York: Appleton-Century Crofts, 1964), p. 156.

Thus, cooperation between the home and the school is important in increasing pupil motivation.

Dealing with Questions about IGE

The school has another fundamental communication responsibility, which is to present what might be called the "state-of-the-school" message. If the school is to enjoy the support of the community, it must make an effort to create an informed parent group. Such support is unlikely if the school does not make itself understood. In IGE schools especially, it is important to explain the terminology which may be new to parents. Hunter emphasizes the need to communicate in terms that are meaningful to the parent.

> Small wonder Dad wishes to know if his son is getting an "A" or an "F" in fifth-grade reading. This is vocabulary to which he is accustomed. While it really conveys little educational meaning, at least he knows whether he should be proud or humiliated and whether to reward or to punish.[7]

Teachers should endeavor to make themselves understood by explaining new concepts in familiar terms.

The parent-teacher conference is not the most efficient medium for educating parents to the practices and procedures of the school. A general informational meeting for that specific purpose is probably preferable. However, the conference can be instrumental in determining when such a meeting might be necessary and on what topics.

---

[7]Madeline C. Hunter, "Home-School Communication," The National Elementary Principal, (November, 1967), p. 131.

To assist with answering questions about IGE, information from a series of parent pamphlets written by Ann Murray of the Merrimack Education Center is included in the Appendix.

III

CONDUCTING THE CONFERENCE

General Helpful Techniques for the Teacher

The best techniques for a parent-teacher conference vary with the personality and needs of the parent. It is important that the teacher become acquainted with a variety of good techniques.

The following hints for successful conferences are suggested by Katherine D'Evelyn.[8] It is interesting to note that while these suggestions were developed over three decades ago, they are still appropriate today:

1. Responsibility for the success or failure of a conference rests primarily with the teacher. It is well to remember that success is relative, and each conference must be judged according to its own circumstances and results.

2. It is well to arrange for no interruptions during the conference. Nothing is more disturbing to the serious efforts of trying to think through a problem than to be interrupted at a crucial moment.

3. It is easier to build a cooperative relationship if the teacher is not seated behind a desk.

4. The teacher's greeting should be friendly and relaxed. If he is hurried or tense, the parent will know it. It is difficult to discuss a problem with someone who looks as if he wished you were not there, or would leave soon.

5. Listen, and then listen some more. The teacher did not invite the parent in to deliver a lecture to him, but to get, as well as to give, help. Encourage the parent to talk, and then listen to what he has to say.

---

[8] Katherine D'Evelyn, Individual Parent-Teacher Conferences. (New York: Bureau of Publications, Teacher's College, Columbia, 1945), pp. 95-97.

6. Find out how the parent is thinking and feeling about his child. This is important, because the teacher cannot understand the child's behavior until he knows the parent's attitude.

7. If the parent says he is worried about the child's behavior, follow through. Find out why he is worried. The teacher should not assume that he knows why. He and the parent may not feel the same way about the child.

8. If a parent gives what he thinks is a reason for a child's behavior, accept it, and lead the discussion on to the consideration of other possible causes. Behavior is the result of many causative factors, not of one.

9. If a parent suggests a plan of action, accept it if at all possible to do so. It is better for the parent to try it than for the teacher to force one of his own. One of the goals in parent counseling is to try to get the parent to take the initiative. If the parent's plan fails, it is always possible to suggest others that may strike nearer to the root of the difficulty.

10. If the parent cannot suggest reasons for a child's behavior, or plans of action to deal with it, the teacher might suggest alternatives for joint consideration.

11. It does not help to argue with a parent. Arguing will arouse resentment and resistance.

12. It is better not to assume that a parent wants help or advice. Such assumption usually brings resistance, because it implies a form of criticism.

13. Most parents cannot be objective about their own children. Therefore, do not criticize, either directly or indirectly. Criticism is fatal to the building of cooperative relationships.

14. Avoid giving direct advice when the parent gives a statement of his problem and then leans back saying, "Tell me what to do." Let any advice or suggestions grow out of mutual discussions and a growing insight on the part of the parent into the reasons for the behavior.

15. Try not to get ahead of the parent in his thinking. In other words, the teacher should not try to push

his thinking onto a parent before the parent is ready to see it through a process of discussion of mutual thinking.

16. Try to be aware of sensitive spots, and avoid embarrassing the parents by anything you do, say, or notice, such as facial expressions, gestures, and voice. These all give a clue to the parent's emotions.

17. Be accepting. That is, accept anything the parent tells you without showing surprise or disapproval. If the teacher cannot do this, he will not get an honest picture of the parent's attitudes and feelings.

18. The teacher should be ready to recognize problems that are so difficult as to prevent him from giving sufficient help to the parent. Parents with complex emotional problems should be referred to the consulting psychologist or guidance specialist on the staff.

19. It is helpful to try to close the conference on a constructive, a pleasant, or a forward-going note such as a plan for further consultations, a definite date for the next conference, a statement of encouragement or reassurance, a statement of a plan for cooperative action.

Some Do's and Don'ts for Successful Parent-Teacher Conferences

The following is a list of suggested do's and don'ts that the teacher may find of value. This is not a complete list of all the things one should or should not do; it is an attempt to point out some of the varied practices that have worked successfully in the past as well as some of the pitfalls a teacher might encounter.[9]

---

[9] Grace Langdon and Irving W. Stout, Teacher-Parent Interviews, (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1954), pp. 312-318.

Do ...

.....Be truthful and honest. Parents appreciate a teacher who can be depended upon to tell things as they are, the pleasant and the unpleasant; a teacher whose word is reliable, and who never tries to put anything over on them.

.....Respect parents' confidence. When parents speak about their own private affairs they are showing a trust and confidence in the teacher that demands great watchfulness so that it is never betrayed.

.....Take what the person says seriously. This is a mark of respect.

.....Be sympathetically understanding but not sentimental.

.....Show genuine interest in what the parents have to say. If you feel it, it is easy to show it.

.....Be ready to explain what is done at school and why it is done. This is a matter of courtesy, but it is also a recognition of the parents' right to know what goes on in school.

.....Avoid teacherish language. Teacherish language can give the impression that you are throwing your weight around or trying to show off, even though that is not intended.

.....Present any suggestions in such a way that parents will be comfortable about taking or leaving them. The parents will quickly catch the feeling that they are under no obligations to accept suggestions just because they are given and that you are not going to watch to see whether they accept them or not.

.....Respect the parents' reserve. This suggests dropping a subject when it is obvious that the parent does not want to discuss it.

.....Listen. Listening can be active and dynamic and vital. The teachers' willingness to listen comes out of a feeling that the parents have much to give.

.....Be careful not to blame and condemn. A teacher who does not feel like a judge pronouncing sentence will not act like one.

.....In giving suggestions offer more than one possibility. This leaves the decision where it belongs--with the parent.

.....Accept. This is perhaps the key to all else. Accept the parents as they are, accept yourself, accept the children, accept the situation. This does not mean a blind, resigned, long-suffering acceptance, but seeing things as they are, without blame for their being that way, without recriminations because they are, and as the only starting point there can be.

Don't...

.....be authoritative. There can never be one right way of doing something.

.....be shocked at whatever is said.

.....jump to conclusions. Better wait and listen instead of being too sure.

.....ask personal questions. Parents may speak voluntarily of personal things, often of very personal ones; but that is quite different from being asked a direct, personal question that will put them on the spot.

.....chide the parents. It is not for the teacher to chide or rebuke.

.....belittle what the parents do. Often it would surprise a teacher to know how many doubts the parent has and how discouraging a word or manner of belittlement can be.

.....make parents feel stupid. No one likes to feel stupid. A parent treated in this way is likely to be cautious when he speaks thereafter.

Quotable Quotes and Their Meaning

In the section which follows, some typical negative parent reactions to conferences are given. It is important to avoid the situations which lead to negative feelings, as they are detrimental to effective communication.

> I wish Mrs. Bonner hadn't called that conference so early in the year. She admitted that she didn't know Brian well enough to talk about his work. What a waste of both of our time.

In order to interact effectively with parents, teachers must first know the child. A teacher who does not understand the student and is not familiar with his progress may feel insecure and defensive.[10] If the teacher feels that he or she does not know a child very well (because of time limitations, the child's passivity or introversion, or any other reason), he or she should say so rather than speak about the child in general terms. Parents want specific information about their child.[11]

> I don't understand why we, as parents, can't have concrete information about our child. If there are test scores for our child, they ought to be shared with us.

Avoid making broad predictive generalizations about the student's character or ability. Make specific observations based on the student's demonstrated behavior.

---

[10]Hugh H. Carberry, The Teacher and Parent-Teacher Conferences. Today's Education, Vol. 64, No. 1, (January-February, 1975), p. 67.

[11]Ibid. p. 67.

> I don't know what to believe. Last time I asked about Tim, the teacher assured me that everything was fine. Suddenly, now, there are all kinds of problems. I wonder if Mr. Thomas was telling the whole story in the first place.

Parents want honest answers to their questions. This is often easier said than done. It can be very difficult to be completely objective in personal discussions with parents.

Glossing over the truth may be the comfortable thing to do at the time, but it can be very harmful to the child in the long run and may destroy the teacher's credibility with the parents. Parents complain the most about the teacher who leads them to believe that all is going well when it is not.

> I wish Miss Cargill had given me some ideas about where to begin in helping Jim with his problem. I would like to be able to support what the school is doing.

The conference is the perfect time for the parents and teachers to exchange information and come up with the best plan for working with a student. What each knows about the child can be incorporated into an effective plan.

I think the teacher thinks I'm a poor mother.

Some parents blame themselves for the difficulties their children have in school. Others feel incompetent to express their feelings about educational matters. When parents feel insecure, conferences are likely to be a threatening experience. Do whatever you can to get the parents off the defensive. Greet them warmly. Avoid the use of technical terms whenever possible.

> I felt as if Mr. Zelmer never heard my ideas and suggestions. I know my child as well, if not better, than the school, and it's about time they recognized it.

A parent-teacher conference is a cooperative venture for gaining understanding of the child. It is essentially a sharing relationship and it implies appreciation of the contributions of both the teachers and parents to the education of the child.[12]

Most parents are concerned about their child, even though they may not appear to be. School personnel often underestimate the parents' ability to provide them with invaluable information about the child.

Make every effort, therefore, to involve parents in the conference discussion. Encourage them to present their viewpoints. Delay making your own suggestions. Rather, invite parent suggestions and build on those.

> Joe's teacher wasn't interested in my comments. He rejected everything I had to say.

Parents tune out teachers who are skeptical of parent concerns and unreceptive to any criticism of school procedures. If the parents see the teacher as unwilling to listen, they will cease listening themselves.

It is important for the teacher to avoid reacting personally to a parent's criticism. At times it is best to overlook critical remarks. State your position but do not argue or try to out-talk the parent. Remember that parents may bring feelings to the conference which are only marginally related to you. Remember also that it may be necessary for the parent to get something off his or her

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[12]Kleinfeldt, Expectations for the Parent-Teacher Conference, p. 18.

chest before anything constructive can occur. Even the most difficult parents can be willing to listen after they have had their say. Many parents are disarmed when they find that someone is willing to listen.

IV

CONFERENCE FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES

Post-Conference Considerations

Conferring, like many things, improves with practice. But practice is valuable only when you recognize and try to correct mistakes. The following list of questions is designed to help in the evaluation of conferences from the standpoint of what was learned about the parents' concerns and how the conference was conducted.

1. Was it a cordial meeting?
2. What were the parents' reactions?
3. What did I learn that will help me in my relations with the child?
4. Did I plan <u>with</u>, rather than for, the parents?
5. Did the parents learn a little more about the child?
6. Did I help the parents to talk freely?
7. Did I ask prying questions?
8. Did I praise the child in some way?
9. Did the parents leave with a friendly, optimistic attitude?
10. Did I jot down pertinent points on the child's record for future use?
11. What did I learn that will help me in my relations with the parents?
12. Were the objectives of the teacher(s) met?
13. Were the objectives of the parents met?

General Parent Concerns Expressed in the Conferences

1. Was any particular concern expressed more than once?

2. Which parents were concerned about them?

3. Were any concerns brought up that should be discussed in unit meetings, with the principal, at the IIC?

V

DARE TO BE CREATIVE WITH CONFERENCES

Many schools have been creative with their conferences and have come up with a format that meets their needs. Some of these suggestions may be useful in planning conferences for your school.

Try a Student-Directed Conference

One approach that has proved successful places responsibility for arranging and conducting the conference on the student. The key considerations of a conference in which the child is responsible are these:

1. The child arranges and coordinates the conference. The teacher lets the students know when he/she will be available for conferences. It is then up to each child to coordinate his parents' time with the teacher's availability. Cancellations, changes, conflicts or problems are all handled through the child.

2. The child meets his parents at the appointed time, conducts them to the office (to meet "visitor" requirements) and might introduce them to the principal or office staff. He then conducts them to the conference room and is responsible for reporting his progress.

3. One function of the teacher is to keep the child honest. The teacher makes sure the child does not give the parents a "snow job" or present unreal or biased information. For most children the teacher asks questions (if the parents do not) to get clarification, explanation, and elaboration. After the first conference, the child usually sees the value of keeping a log, folder, or record of his progress--but this is not a requirement.

4. The teacher serves in the role of mediator and makes observations about the interaction. One of the primary functions of the teacher is to deal with the affective

domain and demonstrate proper responses for the parents (i.e., acceptance, nonjudgment, empathy, etc.) and to focus on the positive and human elements of schooling.

Take Your Conference to the Home

In some circumstances the parent may not be able to come to the school for a conference. Under such conditions, the teacher should consider going to the home to communicate with the parents. The same preplanning and conference guidelines would apply to the home visit. Special attention should be given to scheduling a time when the minimum number of interruptions would take place so that attention of parents and teacher can be directed toward the child and the child's progress. The teacher will need to carry samples of the child's textbooks and work to the home.

VI

SIMULATION:
PARENT-TEACHER CONFERENCE INTERACTION STYLES

Introduction

Each parent-teacher conference is different. The interplay of parent and teacher conference behavior determines the success or failure of the conference. The skillful teacher interacts with parents so that he can accomplish the conference goals. He is able to recognize different parent interaction styles and modify his behavior appropriately.

This simulation is designed to foster awareness of the impact of three predominant teacher interaction styles and five parent styles that can be difficult to deal with. There are no right or wrong answers in this exercise. It is intended to assist teachers to begin formulating their own theories of the appropriateness of alternative conference styles in various situations.

Simulation Overview

Simulation participants will view three role-playing episodes designed to illustrate alternative parent and teacher conference interaction styles. Observers will attempt to identify the behavior patterns being modeled in each conference and note the impact of each. A simulation leader will coordinate the episodes and lead the feedback discussion.

Simulation Leader Instructions

There are four objectives for participants:

1. To enable participants to analyze different teacher behaviors and the impact these behaviors have on parent-teacher conferences.

2. To enable participants to analyze different parent behaviors and the impact these behaviors have upon parent-teacher conferences.

3. To recognize beneficial and detrimental behaviors of both parents and teachers.

4. To develop a list of concepts, conclusions, and/or generalizations regarding the conference interaction styles portrayed.

These objectives should be communicated to the participants at the beginning of the session. It would be wise to write them on a chalkboard or distribute a handout.

Room Arrangements

1. Almost any room arrangement will do as long as participants can readily observe the role-playing demonstration.

2. The simulation can accommodate both small and large groups of participants. Keep in mind, however, that the larger the group the less involvement you will have in the feedback discussion session. There are role-playing activities for as many as eight individuals.

Materials

The following materials are needed:

1. Materials for observers (one set per observer)

   a. Teacher Behavior Chart
   b. Parent Behavior Chart
   c. Conference Reaction Chart
   d. Situational Episode: Mark Bryan

2. Materials for Role-Players

   a. Teacher Role A Instruction Sheet (to Teacher A only)
   b. Teacher Role B Instruction Sheet (to Teacher B only)
   c. Teacher Role C Instruction Sheet (to Teacher C only)
   d. Parent Role I Instruction Sheet (to Parent I only)
   e. Parent Role II Instruction Sheet (to Parent II only)
   f. Parent Role III Instruction Sheet (to Parent III only)
   g. Parent Role IV Instruction Sheet (to Parent IV only)
   h. Parent Role V Instruction Sheet (to Parent V only)

3. Flip chart with markers, or chalkboard, for listing conceptual conclusions during the feedback session.

Selecting the Role Players

1. In selecting people to do the role playing, the session leader may proceed in several ways: (a) ask for volunteers; (b) assign roles to people he thinks will do a good job. Be sure not to assign an individual a role that resembles his real-life behavior. While the roles are exaggerated to prevent individuals from being unduly threatened, it is important that no one be put on the spot; (c) assign them randomly.

2. The Conference Reaction Chart provides space to analyze three separate conferences. This simulation will focus on only three of the five Difficult Parent Behavior roles. If time permits you may want to go on and role play the other two parent roles.

3. Matching the particular teacher and parent behaviors to be modeled in each conference can be done in any way, but make certain that the sequence does not follow the same order as the Conference Reaction Chart. Try to keep the mix as nearly random as possible.

Timing

Each conference should last between five and ten minutes. Allow time at the conclusion of each conference for observers to mark their Conference Reaction Chart and make notes. Do not allow for group discussion between conferences. After the last conference, move

immediately into the feedback discussion session.

Discussion Session

This is a critical part of the simulation. It is during the discussion session that concepts are generated and closure reached. The success of the simulation depends upon the skill of the session leader during this part of the simulation.

The session leader has four major tasks:

1. To review the initial objectives of the simulation.
2. To lead the discussion of what occurred during the conferences.
3. To facilitate reaching consensus on the roles portrayed in each conference.
4. To facilitate development of a list of generalizations or concepts learned from the exercise.

Hints for Leading the Discussion Session

1. Begin by asking "What interaction styles were portrayed in the first conference?"
2. Ask "What specific conference behavior led you to your conclusion?"
3. Ask:
   a) If you were the parent, how would you feel toward the teacher?
   b) If you were the teacher, how would you feel toward the parent?
   c) If you were the parent, how would you feel about accepting the teacher's suggestions?
   d) If you were the parent or teacher, how would this conference affect your self-confidence?
   e) If you were the teacher or parent, to what extent would the conference have been effective in helping you deal with the child and his/her school relationships?
4. Repeat these steps for discussion of the second and third conferences.
5. Generate a list of generalized concepts for the simformation as a whole.

Hints for Developing a List of Generalized Concepts

1. Closure for the simulation comes at this point. Ask the group simply: "What has this exercise taught us about parent-teacher conferences?" Indicate that you will make a list of these generalized ideas on the chalkboard and that this list will then be typed, duplicated, and distributed to each participant. (Critical part: Follow through on what has been learned.)

2. You may need some examples to break the ice:

   Participants tend to react differently to different styles of conferencing.

   Different individuals tend to react in different ways to the same style of conferencing.

   Participants tend to be most positive toward the democratic-consensus style.

   Participants tend to be neutral or negative in their reactions to the hardnosed or laissez-faire therapeutic style.

   The laissez-faire role tends to encourage verbal interaction but it is not task oriented or problem centered.

   A non-directive, constructive approach gives the teacher insights into the parents' perception of the problem.

   A direct, critical approach puts the teacher in the role of expert and thus tends to rule out the use of other resources for improvement.

   A laissez-faire approach tends to build false confidence on the part of the parent and offers no guidelines for improvement.

Variations on the Simulation

You may vary procedures to meet specific needs, group size, etc.

Some suggestions are:

1. The session leader can play all three teacher roles.

2. The participant group can be broken up into smaller groups with each group analyzing one conference.

3. Vary the methods by which the session leader selects role players.

4. Separate the teacher types and parent types and have eight conferences.

MATERIALS

CONFERENCE REACTION CHART

Directions:

You are going to view three role-playing episodes. Using the Teacher Behavior Chart and the Parent Behavior Chart, try to identify the teacher type and the parent type for each conference. Place a check mark in the correct box for each conference. Take notes below on each conference to use during the feedback discussion session. You may also want to review the issues of the discussion by rereading, "Situational Episode: Mark Bryan."

	Teacher Behavior Types			Parent Behavior Types				
	Teacher A	Teacher B	Teacher C	Parent I	Parent II	Parent III	Parent IV	Parent V
Conference I								
Conference II								
Conference III								

Make notes indicating what specific things occurred during each conference which lead you to the conclusion you chose. Use the back of this sheet if you need more room.

CONFERENCE I

CONFERENCE II

CONFERENCE III

SITUATIONAL EPISODE: MARK BRYAN

Mark Bryan is a 12 year old student in the Omega Unit (10-11-12 year olds) of Central IGE School.

His work is satisfactory except in instances where he must work alone or, less frequently, in small group situations. Mark's teachers feel that he is somewhat lazy and uninterested in school. When he takes to an idea, he really can produce.

At times, Mark can be a discipline problem. During the last two weeks, the following episodes occurred:

1. Mark got into a fight with another boy in the quiet study area.
2. Mark was accused by one girl (teacher has no proof) of vandalizing a learning center on map skills.
3. Mark disrupted a small group session by instigating and maintaining unrelated side conversations with two other boys.
4. Mark was belligerent when reprimanded for running through the Materials Resource Center (library).

Academically, Mark gets by, the the team believes he could produce much more. His I.Q. is 120, but he performed at the 51st percentile in reading vocabulary and comprehension on his last standardized achievement test. In mathematical reasoning he scored at the 44th percentile. Mark usually completes his work, but usually the quality is not acceptable. He always seems to understand his learning objectives, performs reasonably well on tests, but seems to fall down during his learning activities.

For example, the unit team places a great deal of emphasis on independent learning and requires their students to do independent projects

both during school and outside of school. Each learning program has one outside project to coincide with specified learning objectives developed by the team. These cover various subjects and students have a choice in selection of independent projects. Mark never seems to complete his outside projects. Every time Mr. (Ms.) Carlson, Unit Leader, talks with Mark he says that he completes his research in the Instructional Materials Center, but doesn't get around to writing, or whatever is needed to complete the project.

Mark blames his home situation for his being unable to complete assignments. He has eight brothers and sisters and both parents are employed. Household tasks are carried out by the children in the family and Mark has a rather rigorous chore schedule. Another factor, according to Mark, is that he does not have a place to study in the home where he can put out his materials and work quietly.

Based upon the foregoing information, at conference time, Mr. (Ms.) Carlson sees several issues to discuss with Mr. or Mrs. Bryan:

1. Mark's applying himself to learning tasks
2. Recent behavioral concerns
3. Assistance in getting Mark to do his out-of-school assignments
4. Establishing a regular home study place and study time for Mark

TEACHER BEHAVIOR CHART

Teacher Role Type	Characteristic Behaviors
1. Teacher A	1. Assumes a frank, direct approach to the parent. 2. Asserts dominance as the expert and is in control of conference from the start. 3. Emphasizes negative aspects of student behavior. 4. Gives specific directions on how to remediate situation. 5. Uses threats to show seriousness of situation. 6. Gives parent little or no chance to ask questions or to explain. 7. Places blame for problem situation on factors beyond the control of the school.
2. Teacher B	1. Avoids getting the the "heart" of the problem. 2. Acts very easy going. 3. Is careful not to take issue with parent's views. 4. Promotes chitchat and small talk. 5. May imply a problem exists but only in vague terms. 6. Avoids criticizing the child.
3. Teacher C	1. Acts as situational counselor. 2. Is open to parents' point of view. 3. Encourages parents' role in helping with problem. 4. Seeks clarification from the parent. 5. Acknowledges the problem. 6. Offers concrete suggestions. 7. Encourages talking problem out. 8. Makes specific plans for follow-up activities with parents.

TEACHER ROLE A: INSTRUCTION SHEET

PLEASE DO NOT ALLOW OTHER PARTICIPANTS TO READ THIS OR REVEAL WHAT YOUR ROLE IS TO BE

You are Mary (or Mike) Carlson, Unit Leader of Omega Unit (10-11-12 year olds) of Central IGE School. Mr./Ms. Bryan will be coming to discuss Mark's progress in school. Please familiarize yourself with the situation by studying, "Situational Episode: Mark Bryan" thoroughly.

As the teacher, you are to behave in an autocratic, hardnosed manner. In order to assist you, a list of things you might say follows. Try to include as many as you can:

1. Tell the parents that "he's a problem!"
2. Be negative towards Mar --and negative about kids in general.
3. Dominate the conversation.
4. Use "put downs," such as, "He's lazy."
5. Be rude.
6. Make references to the "good old days" when children had more respect.
7. Mention how, nowadays, parents aren't as concerned about school and children as they used to be.
8. Use words and phrases such as:

   --uncooperative
   --trouble maker
   --disinterested
   --poor grade of work
   --fails outside assignments

9. Tell (don't suggest) Mr./Ms. Bryan that they should provide:

   a. a place for Mark to study
   b. a time for Mark to study
   c. more discipline at home

10. Ask when and how <u>they</u> are going to solve the problem.
11. Write down the answers the parent gives as if you were going to check.

12. End conference abruptly when you have your message across to the parents.

13. Assure the parents that you are going to check up on Mark's progress in the next two weeks.

14. Thank the parents for being so cooperative.

TEACHER ROLE B: INSTRUCTION SHEET

PLEASE DO NOT ALLOW OTHER PARTICIPANTS TO READ THIS OR REVEAL WHAT YOUR ROLE IS TO BE

You are Mary (or Mike) Carlson, Unit Leader of Omega Unit (10-11-12 year olds) of Central IGE School. Mr./Mrs. Bryan will be coming to discuss Mark. Please familiarize yourself with the situation by studying, "Situational Episode: Mark Bryan" thoroughly.

As the teacher, you are to behave in an apathetic, therapeutic manner. This means you are to act very easy going and at all costs avoid discussing any things which may be "touchy." The following is a list of things you might say. Try to include as many as you can:

1. Greet the parents warmly. Be extremely nice and polite.
2. Initiate discussion with much small talk:
   a. "How's the weather outside?"
   b. "How long have you lived in the community?"
   c. Refer to some recent news item or sporting event.
3. Avoid coming to the task at hand (Mark's problems).
4. Make certain <u>you</u> do not bring up Mark's work habits or behavior problems. When parents bring the topic up (Why am I here? How is Mark doing? Is Mark behaving?), gloss over it with statements like:
   a. "Mark has a lot of energy, like all kids his age."
   b. "Boys will be boys!"
   c. "Mark has little problems, but he'll outgrow them."
   d. "Things usually work themselves out."
5. Ask parents distracting questions unrelated to the problems:
   a. "Have you visited our remodeled library?"
   b. "Do you like the room decorations?"
6. Discuss your instructional program in very general, not specific terms.

7. Your main task is to put parents at ease and to minimize Mark's school problems. Be very nice and polite.

8. End the conference by thanking the parents for being so cooperative. Close with:

   "I certainly wish all parents were as interested as you. All of us here try to do our best."

TEACHER ROLE C: INSTRUCTION SHEET

PLEASE DO NOT ALLOW OTHER PARTICIPANTS TO READ THIS OR REVEAL WHAT YOUR ROLE IS TO BE

You are Mary (or Mike) Carlson, Unit Leader of Omega Unit (10-11-12 year olds) of Central IGE School. Mr./Ms. Bryan will be coming in to discuss Mark. Please familiarize yourself with the situation by studying, "Situational Episode: Mark Bryan" thoroughly.

As the teacher, you are to behave in a democratic manner and try to reach consensus on problem solutions.

The following is a list of things you might say. Try to include as many as you can.

1. Greet the parent warmly, indicating how pleased you are that he or she could come.
2. Say how you hope to work together to solve Mark's problems.
3. Be cordial.
4. Show intense interest in Mark.
5. Make several positive comments about him.
6. Say that there are a couple of issues that the teachers need more information about from the parents:
   a. Ask how well Mark accomplishes tasks at home.
   b. Ask if anything has happened to make him uptight lately.
      1. Refer to recent discipline concerns specifically.
      2. Ask for suggestions from the parents as to how these might be handled.
7. Relate Mark's conversation with you about why he can't get outside projects done (study time and study place problem). Ask the parent to clarify the situation and offer suggestions.
8. Be prepared to offer concrete suggestions for study place and time.
   a. "Is there one table, or corner, Mark can use?"
   b. "Can you rearrange his chore schedule?"

9. Tell parents you will call in two weeks to report on Mark.
10. Offer to restructure the school day somewhat to better meet Mark's needs.
11. Be constructive, helpful, and show real interest.

DIFFICULT PARENT BEHAVIOR CHART

Parent Role Type	Characteristic Behaviors
1. Parent I	1. Projects parents' personality on the child. 2. Has high aspirations for the student. 3. Verbalizes problems he or she had in school. ("I could never do it either.") 4. Believes, states, pretends nothing is really wrong.
2. Parent II	1. Is hostile and aggressive. 2. Is uncooperative. 3. Complains about unrelated issues (bus schedules, quality of lunches). 4. Tries to put teacher on defensive. 5. Exaggerates concerns and blames school program. 6. Will not listen.
3. Parent III	1. Is nervous about discussing child's progress. 2. Is overly concerned about achievement. 3. Asks for details on classroom procedures and activities. 4. Suspects that the teacher blames him/her for student's failings. 5. May become emotional.
4. Parent IV	1. Denies a problem exists. 2. Says, "My son (or daughter) never behaves that way at home." 3. Expresses disbelief at what teacher is telling parent. 4. Readily places cause for problem on other students. 5. Lets the teacher do most of the talking.
5. Parent V	1. Reaction to any problem is to punish child. 2. Not as interested in cause of problem as what punitive steps parent will take. 3. Encourages teacher to also be punitive.

PARENT I: INSTRUCTION SHEET

PLEASE DO NOT ALLOW OTHER PARTICIPANTS TO READ THIS OR REVEAL WHAT YOUR ROLE IS TO BE

You are Jan Bryan, Mark Bryan's mother (father). You are coming into school to discuss Mark's school progress with Mary (Mike) Carlson, Unit Leader of the Omega Unit (10-11-12 year olds) at Central IGE School. Please familiarize yourself with the situation by studying, "Situational Episode: Mark Bryan."

As the parent, you are to exhibit a self-satisfied, unflappable, confident air. Appear to be amused by Mark's shenanigans.

In the course of the conversation indicate that:

1. You have high aspirations for Mark, that he will undoubtedly go to college and graduate school.
2. You assume that Mark is much the same kind of student that you were.
3. It is unlikely that anything is really wrong.
4. If there is a problem, it must be school-related.

Whenever appropriate, try to interject comments like the following:

"I wasn't exactly a saint when I was in school either, but it never really interfered with my studies."

"Well, Mark's a high spirited young lad. I'd rather have him get into some trouble than none at all."

"I'm sure Mark's interest will pick up once he gets into more challenging situations. I used to find school pretty boring, too."

PARENT II: INSTRUCTION SHEET

PLEASE DO NOT ALLOW OTHER PARTICIPANTS TO READ THIS OR REVEAL WHAT YOUR ROLE IS TO BE

You are Jan Bryan, Mark Bryan's mother (father). You are coming into school to discuss Mark's school progress with Mary (Mike) Carlson, Unit Leader of the Omega Unit (10-11-12 year olds) at Central IGE School. Please familiarize yourself with the situation by studying, "Situational Episode: Mark Bryan."

As the parent, you are to assume an abrasive, antagonistic attitude. Avoid reaching closure on anything. Interrupt the teacher with irrelevant points. Change the subject whenever the teacher seems to be making a good point. Assume that the teacher has it in for Mark and that any problems Mark has are the school's fault.

Wherever possible, put the teacher on the defensive with statements like:

"I think this independent study stuff is a bunch of baloney. As far as I'm concerned, teachers are paid to teach."

"We didn't have this problem in Midvale!"

"Mark tells me you don't like him. Is that true?"

"How do you know Mark did this anyway? Did you see him do it? Did it ever occur to you that this other student might be trying to get Mark in trouble? Kids do that, you know."

"You probably don't care what I think anyway."

"Do you really think you can be objective about Mark?"

"By the way, why aren't the doors to the building open at 8:00 a.m.? Mark has to stand out in that cold for 15 minutes. Maybe he'd have a better attitude toward school if the school showed it cared about him."

PARENT III: INSTRUCTION SHEET

PLEASE DO NOT ALLOW OTHER PARTICIPANTS TO READ THIS OR REVEAL WHAT YOUR ROLE IS TO BE

Your are Jan Bryan, Mark Bryan's mother (father). You are coming into school to discuss Mark's school progress with Mary (Mike) Carlson, Unit Leader of the Omega Unit (10-11-12 year olds) at Central IGE School. Please familiarize yourself with the situation by studying, "Situational Episode: Mark Bryan."

As the parent you are very anxious about this conference. You suspect that Mark is having trouble at school. You have been having a lot of problems of your own with Mark since your recent separation and don't really know how to handle him. You are uptight and uneasy, believing that the teacher probably blames you for Mark's problems.

You are primarily concerned with Mark's shoddy academic record. Demonstrate your concern by nodding your head and interjecting quick little comments like "yes" or "I see" in a way that suggests you are expecting the teacher to go on. Ask for details on classroom procedures and activities.

When the teacher details Mark's problems, become overwrought and emotional. Use statements like the following:

"I don't understand what's happening!"

"I've tried everything I could think of!"

"Nothing seems to work."

"I don't know what to do anymore!"

Ask the teacher what he or she thinks you should do. Refuse to leave this issue. Make it difficult for the conference to continue. If the teacher insists on proceeding, make it clear that you are not listening.

PARENT IV: INSTRUCTION SHEET

PLEASE DO NOT ALLOW OTHER PARTICIPANTS TO READ THIS OR REVEAL WHAT YOUR ROLE IS TO BE

You are Jan Bryan, Mark Bryan's mother (father). You are coming into school to discuss Mark's school progress with Mary (Mike) Carlson, Unit Leader of the Omega Unit (10-11-12 year olds) at Central IGE School. Please familiarize yourself with the situation by studying, "Situational Episode: Mark Bryan."

As the parent, your main task is to avoid acknowledging that a problem exists. Be skeptical. Express disbelief at what the teacher is telling you with comments such as, "I can't believe that; I never have that problem at home."

Secondly, avoid assuming any responsibility for Mark's problems. Assume that any problems are school initiated and that the solution is to be found at school. Blame other students for Mark's shenanigans. Suggest that the teacher separate these "troublemakers" from your son. Indicate that, "We never had these problems at Mark's other school."

With the above exceptions, avoid initiating any conversation. Let the teacher do most of the talking. When asked to respond, do so in short, quick sentences.

PARENT V: INSTRUCTION SHEET

PLEASE DO NOT ALLOW OTHER PARTICIPANTS TO READ THIS OR REVEAL WHAT YOUR ROLE IS TO BE

You are Jan Bryan, Mark Bryan's mother (father). You are coming into school to discuss Mark's school progress with Mary (Mike) Carlson, Unit Leader of the Omega Unit (10-11-12 year olds) at Central IGE School. Please familiarize yourself with the situation by studying, "Situational Episode: Mark Bryan."

You will overreact when informed of Mark's problems in school. Your reaction will be to punish him. You will be angry and should immediately respond with comments like:

"Wait till I get home. I'll straighten this thing out!"

"What he needs is a good licking!"

"Why wasn't I informed of this earlier?"

Threaten to restrict Mark till the next marking period. Inform the teacher that he or she shouldn't "mollycoddle" him and that "you've got my permission to hit him whenever you need to bring him into line."

Make it obvious that you're not interested in the teacher's speculations as to what's causing the problem.

APPENDIX

PARENT PAMPHLETS BY ANN MURRAY

Dear Parent,

The first series of Parent Pamphlets was written after we had moved to the Harrington School in Chelmsford, Mass. I hoped to share both my excitement about the IGE learning program and information about it written in "plain talk." Series I responded to such parent questions and comments as:

What On Earth Is IGE?
But It's So Different!
Why Do They Call Them Units?
Just How Do You Individualize?
How Come My Child Has So Many Teachers?
Where Do I Come In?

The second series is being written since the time my volunteer "public relations and publicity" job at the Harrington developed into a position of "field agent" with Merrimack Valley Project League.

I now have had the chance to observe and work with parents in 14 IGE schools, and am continually impressed by the tremendous job these people are doing. They provide their principals with valuable educational feedback; they publish informative newsletters; they head up diverse volunteer activities.

Since I've had the chance to learn more and more about IGE, and since I've been asked many new questions by parents, I see a need for many more pamphlets to be written. "Many Years Ago" and "What's the Difference?" are a start.

It is my sincere hope that you find these and any future pamphlets of value.

Sincerely,

Ann Murray

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WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE? . . . . I.G.E. vs THE TRADITIONAL APPROACH.			
LEARNING CONCEPT, APPROACH, or PROCEDURE	THE TRADITIONAL APPROACH	THE I.G.E. APPROACH	ADVANTAGES OF I.G.E.
1. Organization	By grade (25-35 pupils; 1 teacher).	By unit (100-175 pupils; 4-7 teachers plus aides).	More flexible grouping; more levels and more variety of materials accessible.
2. Administration	One "boss" (principal) over all teachers.	Unit leaders, heading up team of 4-7 teachers, share administrative responsibilities with principal.	Decisions are made, based on closer-first-hand knowledge of the kids; efforts of teachers in a unit are better coordinated.
3. Pupil Age	Pupils in each class within 12 months age span.	Pupils in unit have up to 36 months age span.	Grouping according to need and interest, rather than age; more chance for pupils to learn from and teach each other.
4. Grouping	Whole class instruction and "tracking". (i. e. "Top" group stays together all day for all subjects.)	Grouping varies from subject to subject and is constantly changing; extensive use of small group; also independent, one-to-one, and whole class.	Greater opportunity to provide pupil with the learning situations in which he'll learn best.
5. Curriculum	Three r's plus social-science; emphasis on mastery of fact, and pupil's standing in relationship to class.	Same subject matter, but approach emphasizes setting objectives in each subject area, and placing pupil at level in which he needs instruction.	Learning skills and objectives sequentially listed; continuous assessment built in; self-improvement and learning-how-to-learn stressed.
6. Assessment	"Big test" for whole class. Numerical grade important.	Pre and post-test cycle; continous assessment on paper and by observation.	Pupil charts own progress and not discouraged by continual failing; individual growth and progress important.
7. Media	Textbook most important.	Multi-level materials, and extensive use of varied media like headsets, films, manipulatives, games, etc.	Pupils more interested and involved in what they're doing; decision-making and responsibility encouraged.
8. Teaming	Optional; when done, usually by subject (1 teacher handles math; 1, reading, etc.)	"Multi-disciplinary" teaching; purpose of teaming is to share teaching talents, and insights into pupils.	More attention on individual pupil, and individualized instruction.
9. Atmosphere	More structured; chairs in rows; material passed out to desk.	More movement; small groups working in different areas; resources throughout school used.	Situation more like real life; children encouraged to use resources, and become self-sufficient.
10. In Service	Self-improvement often up to individual staff member.	I.G.E. workshops, conferences, and publications keep staff up to date and informed.	Teachers do not become "stale;" continually update and improve individualization and diagnostic techniques.
11. Home School Program	Generally P.T.O. type organization with social and fund-raising responsibilities.	Parent Advisory Committee which provides 2-way communication between parents and the school; also usually coordinates volunteer program.	Parents become better informed and more involved.
12. Overall Attitude Toward Child	Child must "fit into" the educational system.	The educational system should be modified to best suit pupil needs.	Child encouraged to develop postive attitude about himself and school; has more opportunity for success experiences; learns how to set goals and achieve them.

BUT IT'S SO DIFFERENT!

A Parent Pamphlet

by

Ann Murray

You're certainly right about that. An IGE school is very different from the kind that most of us attended, but is that bad?!

Was your school experience exciting? Interesting? Inspiring? Were you encouraged by your teachers? Made to feel you had special talents or abilities? Did you ever play a math game or use a developmental reading kit?

Look at the world today. When you attended elementary school, did you discuss space trips, ecology, or the dangers of drugs? Why should schools remain the same through the years, when nothing else has?

It is impossible today for thoughtful educators to select a given set of facts and say, "This body of knowledge is most important and must be mastered." A whole new set of facts comes into the world every second!

We are shortchanging our children if all we do is give them books and have them "spit back" to the teachers what is on the page. Classrooms in which this is happening may always be neat, orderly, and quiet, but they are also dead.

IGE parents sometimes become suspicious because their children LIKE school--but this is exactly the way it's supposed to be. Careful planning and pupil access to a variety of learning activities and materials have made this possible. Have no fear--IGE teachers are striving harder than ever to develop in children such "old virtues" as responsibility, independence, and a desire to succeed. The atmosphere of an IGE school is, in fact, much more likely to do so, than one in which the children all do the same thing at the same time.

Nor are the three R's neglected. On the contrary, very specific objectives in these areas are spelled out (such as "recognizing beginning blends," or "adding a column of five two-digit numbers"). A child is pretested to determent what he already knows in a given subject area, and instruction proceeds at the next step. Furthermore, an IGE school contains many self-directing, self-correcting materials which enable a child to get extra practice in skills he is weak in.

Teachers in IGE schools are "different" too. They are never complacent or self-satisfied, but continually try to improve their teaching effectiveness.

It is important that we develop in our children a questioning mind, rather than just mastery of fact. It is important that children get excited about discovery and the process of learning itself, so they will want to continue it the rest of their lives. It is important that they be given a variety of learning experiences, so that they have more chances to experience creativity and the satisfactions of achievement. Hopefully, in an IGE school your child will "learn how to learn."

Dear Parent:

As a parent who moved from a school that was "quiet as a tombstone," I became very excited about the IGE program at the Harrington School in Chelmsford, Mass. Its effect upon my children was startling--they TALKED about school, they took me to see the LEARNING LAB, they put together TERRARIUMS, they played SPELLING GAMES, they brought home COMPLIMENTS from teachers, they were EXCITED ABOUT LEARNING. School was no longer one of those dreadful but necessary chores that must be endured each day.

I decided to write a series of PARENT PAMPHLETS, first, because I wanted to share my enthusiasm with parents whose support is vitally needed; and secondly, because there is a need for more information written in "lay" language (as opposed to fancy educational terminology).

After all, no one has a better right to information than we parents--it is OUR children in the school, and OUR taxes which support it.

I hope these pamphlets are beneficial. Keep asking questions and share in the excitement of the IGE program at your school.

Sincerely yours,

Ann Murray
Chelmsford, Mass.

20 QUESTIONS PARENTS ASK ABOUT IGE

by

Ann Murray

1. IGE--that's open education, isn't it?

   Not if what you mean by open education is a classroom without walls or unlimited freedom for students. IGE is operating in both traditional and modern settings.

2. But don't IGE kids run around doing just what they want to all day?

   You will find many small and independent groupings, but these learning activities are carefully planned out by the teachers according to the needs of individual children. The teacher may be drilling one group on adding by 100's while other students select pre-tests and worksheets from the math cart, or still others play math checkers.

3. How can the teacher handle so many activities happening at once?

   Of aid to teachers are modern, self-directing materials, teacher aides, and volunteers.

4. Doesn't the teacher have it pretty easy then?

   Not nearly as easy as the teacher who keeps the kids on the same page of the book. Preparing instruction for individualized small groups of independent activities takes an enormous amount of time. The teacher's IGE role requires diagnostic skills, continuous awareness of which pupil is at what level, and flexibility.

5. How does the teacher determine where a child should be?

   The children are given diagnostic tests to determine their level of subject matter, and pre-tests and post-tests keep tabs on their progress from level to level. The teacher also considers the child's interests and behavioral characteristics when setting up the learning program.

6. Why do teachers team?

   Through sharing ideas about individual kids and curriculum, by benefiting from each other's talents and strengths, and by planning together, teachers come out with a more meaningful program that benefits everyone in the unit.

7. Is all IGE curriculum essentially made up of specific brand-name kit materials containing pre-tests, worksheets, and post-tests?

   IGE is not any specific curriculum, but involves rather the instructional approach taken with whatever materials a school's staff is using. The learning program can include worksheets, textbooks, lectures, A-V materials, discussions, manipulatives, and educational games. However, the emphasis is always on suiting the materials to the learner, and not vice-versa.

8. Isn't the student off on his own most of the time?

   Independent is often confused with the term individualized. Independent is just one kind of setting in which the student can learn. In an individualized program the teachers make use of other kinds of grouping too, including one to one, whole class, and most often, small group. The kinds of grouping used by a teacher vary according to the children and subject matter she is working with.

9. Why are there children of more than one age learning together?

   Multi-aging is a natural way to learn when one considers how brothers and sisters or neighborhood children learn with, and from, one another outside school. Multi-age units or learning communities allow for more flexible grouping according to ability, need or interest, and because some children remain, while others move on in a unit each year, multi-aging saves a child from the stigma of staying back. In addition, children can more easily serve as tutors to one another, and teachers have the advantage of knowing or working with a child for more than one year.

10. Why does IGE put so much emphasis on home-school programs?

    Inherent in IGE is a fundamental respect for a parent's right to know what is happening in the schools, and the realization that only parent understanding can bring parent support. Furthermore, parent insight and understanding of his or her own child can add to the teacher's effectiveness in class.

11. What is the difference between IGE Parent Advisory Councils and the standard P.T.O.?

    Parent Advisory Councils meet regularly with the principal to provide feedback and become informed on educational matters, and also usually coordinate the volunteer program. P.T.O.'s on the other hand generally handle the social and fund-raising efforts. IGE schools sometimes function with two separate groups, or combine the duties under the P.A.C.

12. Do volunteers take over the teacher's job?

Volunteers work only under teacher direction, handling such tasks as drills, correcting, or special interests. This actually gives the teacher more time to give concentrated instruction in small groups or on a one-to-one basis, wherever it is needed.

13. Is IGE experimental?

IGE is the product of ten years educational research, and IGE schools generally are scrutinized far more closely than contained classrooms--through self-evaluations by the staff, visitation by the Project League staff, and data evaluated by administrators and school committees.

14. What's the difference between schools using individualized techniques and IGE schools?

IGE puts emphasis on training staff to individualize most effectively, not in a hit or miss manner, and is a total program with many parts working together--organization by unit, teaming, flexible grouping, continuous assessment, multi-aging, multi-media, and community involvement.

15. Why are IGE schools in a league?

The league sponsors inservice training programs, workshops and clinicals; through the league, principals, teachers, and parents share ideas.

16. How do students achieve academically?

As well or better than non-IGE students.

17. Why go to all the trouble of an individualized program?

There are many pluses--children like school and develop positive attitudes toward learning and education; slower learners, because they are challenged at their own level, do not feel they are failures; and faster learners can move on at their own pace. A more real-life atmosphere, as well as the encouragement of self-confidence, are also characteristics of IGE.

18. What about discipline?

If by discipline, you mean sitting in one seat quietly all day, then that is not what you'll find in an IGE school, but respect for other persons and property, standards of acceptable behavior, and responsibility for materials and tasks, are just as important in IGE schools as in any other.

19. But what about the child who needs to be pushed?

If a child needs more direct teacher supervision, such provisions as working closer to the teacher's desk, remaining with the teacher for several subjects, or working in a quieter area are accommodations which can be made along with varying materials and grouping. IGE is not for one particular type of student--but strives to do the best job it can for every individual. However, the goal is not to push forever, but to develop an excitement about learning and one's achievements that leads to self-motivation.

20. Isn't IGE idealistic?

Certainly IGE is idealistic in that it is a program seeking to give more to each individual child--yet the program includes very specific components through which this goal can be approached. And if idealism means looking towards the future and something better, what more appropriate place to find it than in our children's educational program.

In considering the activities which will help solve existing problems, it is essential that the school staff consider the following guidelines:

1. The entire school needs to be involved in creating good home-school-community relations. Teachers, aides, students, and parents, as well as the principal, must be involved in the home-school-community relations program;

2. The entire community must also be involved in creating good home-school-community relations. The school community includes more than the parents of students at the school. Senior citizens, business people, parochial school parents, and parents of preschoolers are important members of the school community;

3. Good home-school-community relations include more than mere communication with the school community. Good two-way communication between the community and the school is essential, but it is not sufficient. The creation of a supportive relationship requires community participation in decision-making, community involvement of time and resources in the school program, and resolution of school-community problems which exist.

A series of simformations designed to provide practical, hands-on materials to improve home-school-community relations are being developed by the R & D Center's Home-School-Community Relations Project. There are six simformations in the current series:

Simformation 1: Introducing Parents to the Wisconsin Design for Reading Skill Development

Simformation 2: A Guide to Organizing a Volunteer Program in IGE Schools

Simformation 3: Home-School Visits

Simformation 4: School Administrator's Interview Handbook

Simformation 5: Reporting Pupil Progress

Simformation 6: Parent-Teacher Conferences

These may be obtained from the CCL Document Service, 1025 West Johnson Street, Madison, Wisconsin 53706.

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